



Douglas M. Duncan
County Executive

CONSTRUCTIVE COMMENTS

MONTGOMERY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF
PERMITTING SERVICES
OCTOBER 2004



Robert C. Hubbard
Director

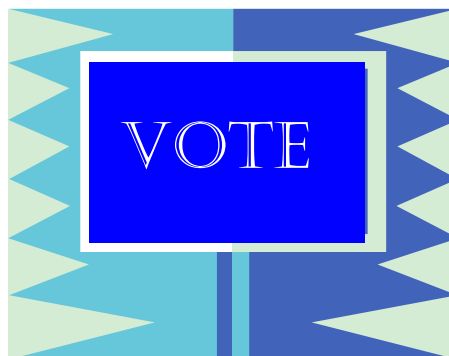
BEFORE YOU POST THAT CANDIDATE'S SIGN....

STOP! Before you put up that sign for your favorite political candidate, there are some things you need to know.

You may post these signs on private property for 30 days with no permit. If you want them up longer, you may post them on private property with a Limited Duration Sign Permit. The permit will also allow you to post them in the public right-of-way on weekends only or for a 14-day period.

A Limited Duration Sign Permit costs \$27.50 and is easy to get. Just complete the application, show us a scaled drawing of the sign, and enclose a site plan that shows the location of the sign. We will send you your permit. The sign cannot be larger than two square feet, which is the typical size of the signs that you see during election season.

Please remember that **YOU MAY NOT POST ANY KIND OF SIGN IN THE RIGHT-OF-WAY WITHOUT A PERMIT.** The Department of Permitting Services will be out in force this season removing signs from the right-of-way. Also, we will be issuing citations for signs posted illegally elsewhere. If you need information about obtaining a permit, please call us at 240-777-6240.





AS I SEE IT ...
**by DPS DIRECTOR
ROBERT HUBBARD**

“OVERTIME OR WAIT IN LINE”

In the permitting business, a dynamic tension has always existed between what people want and what we can give them. Understandably, from a customer’s perspective, this tension is rooted in the twin preoccupations of time and money, that is, if you’re building something, you probably have a loan or have otherwise encumbered funds, and you want that something built as soon as possible. From a permit official’s perspective, the customer and the general public need the protection of codes, laws, and procedures that assure that the permitted project will be safely and legally habitable.

The trick in this business is to minimize the dynamic tension as much as practicable. Programs like commercial “fast-track” permitting, model-house-type plan approval, “green tape,” and pre-design consultations were created with this goal in mind. However, this is typically not a “one-size-fits-all” business, that is, although the ministerial aspects of permitting (forms, etc.) can be standardized, the process of approving a permit cannot. Variables associated with the peculiarities of zoning and topography, architectural design, and engineering sci-

ence, coupled with requirements from collateral approval agencies, and compounded by deficiencies in the permit application and its attachments can protract the process considerably.

This brings us to the title of this article. DPS has a complement of about 185 employees and managers to provide services to an expanding clientele in an environment of increasing technical and legal complexity. Given recent fiscal constraints, that staff has not grown significantly in the past decade. Accordingly, our continuing challenge is to manage our workload without recourse to augmented staffing. For our customers, this may mean having to wait for what may seem like an inordinate amount of time to have a call returned or be served at one of our counters.

“Overtime Or Wait In Line” is a humorously blunt slogan for the reality of permit processing in today’s world. Essentially, it means that we’re happy to help you as fast as we can, but if you want faster plan-review or inspection service, you’ll have to pay for it through the “Overtime Offset” process. This process allows customers to request expedited service by paying for overtime for an employee(s). The process is discretionary, that is, it’s accessible based on staff availability. To request Overtime Offset assistance, customers should ask to speak with a Permitting Services Manager in the DPS Division where the need for overtime arose.

We believe that overtime service would be less necessary if the permit-approval and inspection processes were less problematic from the standpoint of customer responsibility. If we received fewer plans that were missing key design elements; fewer applications with missing, ambiguous or illegible

information; and fewer discrepancies between approved plans and actual construction; we could devote more staff to reducing permit-processing time and the need for overtime. By improving our communications with our clients face-to-face and through our website, through this newsletter, and through continuing interaction with industry/community groups like the Maryland National Capital Building Industry Association, the Montgomery County Builders' Association, and the Allied Civic Group, we believe that this goal is achievable.



CASEWORK MANAGEMENT

A QUICK NOTE ABOUT DRIVEWAY CONTRACTORS

Residents installing or repairing driveways should check that their contractor is licensed by the Maryland Home Improvement Commission ("MHIC"). The MHIC investigates complaints by homeowners, awards monetary damages against licensed contractors, and prosecutes violators of the home-improvement law and regulations.

Licensed contractors have been screened for criminal records, financial solvency, and trade experience and have passed a test on

home-improvement law and business competency.

The MHIC has a Guaranty Fund ("the Fund") financed by assessments to contractors. This Fund compensates homeowners for actual monetary losses due to poor workmanship or failure to perform a home-improvement contract. The Fund applies only to work done by licensed contractors. Each licensed contractor is covered by the Fund for up to \$100,000 for all claims.

NOTE: This article was prepared, in part, with information available at the MHIC website.

<http://www.dllr.state.md.us/license/occprof/homeim.html>

ATTENTION ELECTRICAL AND MECHANICAL CUSTOMERS: AVOID THE RUSH! ARRIVE EARLY!

You may not know it, but the Casework Management Division receives most of its electrical and mechanical permit applications between 10:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. Therefore, you will probably have a longer wait to be served if you show up in that timeframe, rather than earlier in the work-day.

We open for business at 7:30 a.m. We strongly recommend that you arrive then, or shortly thereafter, when we will most likely have the fullest complement of Permit Technicians to help you. Of course, you may always drop off your application(s), and a Permit Technician will call you when it (they) is (are) ready.

To speak to a Permit Technician about electrical or mechanical permits, please call 240-777-6240.

AMENDED BAY-WINDOW POLICY

In the past, DPS considered multi-story bay windows to be additions to existing structures. Accordingly, these windows had to meet the setback requirements for additions. DPS has now modified this interpretation, as follows, so that bay windows are no longer considered to be additions:

A bay window is considered to be an outward projection from the main wall of a building so that the projection forms a bay or alcove in a room. This type of window typically has canted sides and is supported by brackets, cables or similar attachments (cantilevered), or a foundation. A bay window (sometimes called an oriel) not greater than 10 feet in width may project up to three feet into a required front or rear setback. A bay window may not make up more than 50% of the linear width of the front or back of a building.

Be sure to check out the policies, interpretations and drawings on our website at <http://permittingservices.montgomerycountymd.gov>.

BUILDING CONSTRUCTION

AFTER THE STORM: A HOME-OWNER'S GUIDE TO HOME REPAIRS

Our recent experience with the tropical storms that hit the eastern seaboard *seriatim* has made all of us think about what to do in their aftermath. Here's some information about storm damage as it relates to permitting requirements.

Assessing Building Damage

Minor Repairs: This category of repair encompasses damage to siding, shingles, windows, carpeting, wallboard, paint, trim, and other exterior/interior building features. DPS recommends that property owners seek out licensed professional contractors to do damage assessment and repair (See "Finding a Home Improvement Contractor" below.). **Building permits are not required for minor repairs.**

Major Repairs: This category of repair encompasses damage to structural elements of a building, such as roofs, walls, floors, and beams, and damage to non-structural elements that exceeds 25% of the building valuation (fair market value). Repairs of this kind typically involve such things as replacing roofs rafters/trusses, replacing floor joists, replacing wall sections, or reconstructing substantial portions of a building. **Building permits are required for major repairs.**

Assessing Damage to Electrical Systems

Minor Repairs: This category of repair encompasses damage to lighting fixtures, home appliances, electrical cords, and damage to electrical wiring caused by flooding. DPS recommends that property owners seek out reputable repair shops or licensed Montgomery County Electrical contractors to do damage assessment and repair (See "Finding a Home Improvement Contractor" below.). **Electrical permits are generally not required for minor repairs.**

Major Repairs: This category of repair encompasses damage to general-lighting and convenience circuits, service-entrance panels, subpanels, circuit boxes, or any damage

to electrical-supply components from the meter into the house. Repairs of this kind typically involve such things as replacing panels, circuit boxes, and wiring. **Electrical permits are required for major repairs.**

Assessing Damage to Mechanical Systems

Minor Repairs: This category of repair encompasses insubstantial damage to mechanical appliances/equipment/air-supply systems. Repairs of this kind typically involve such things as replacing fans or patching ductwork. DPS recommends that property owners seek out reputable repair shops or licensed professional contractors to do damage assessment and repair (See “Finding a Home Improvement Contractor” below.). **Mechanical permits are not required for minor repairs.**

Major Repairs: This category of repair encompasses substantial damage to heating, ventilating, and air conditioning systems in the home. Repairs of this kind typically involve such things as replacing heat pumps, air-conditioning compressors, and air-supply systems. **Mechanical permits are required for major repairs.**

Finding a Home-Improvement Contractor

First, check to see if the contractor is licensed by the Maryland Home Improvement Commission (410 230-6309). (All home-improvement contractors and salesmen in Maryland are required to be licensed, even for minor jobs.) Then get several estimates. Compare proposals and prices. Remember that, in terms of quality of workmanship, the lowest price may not be the best deal. Call the Montgomery County Dept. of Consumer Affairs (“DCA”)(240 777-3636) and the **Better**

Business Bureau (202 393-8000) for complaint records and general information. Get references from the contractors you are considering. Check with previous customers to find out: 1) whether the work was done on time, 2) whether it was satisfactory, and 3) whether the contractor was responsive to any problems and complaints. Finally, when you do choose a contractor, insist on a written, detailed contract. A written contract is required by law, and details; such as brand names, completion dates, etc.; may help if problems arise. You can also call DCA and request a copy of the "**Guide to Home Improvements**" booklet.

And Finally....

Following major storm events and other natural disasters, DPS inspectors conduct damage assessments and provide Damage Reports that specify the need for plans, permits, or structural evaluations for properties with major damage. If you believe that your home sustained major damage as the result of a major storm event or natural disaster, you may request an inspection or obtain a copy of a Damage Report by calling 240 777-6259.

Depending on the extent of the damage to your home, DPS may require you to obtain the services of a structural engineer to determine whether or not the habitability of your home has been seriously compromised. Structural damage may be hidden in a building component (e.g., a roof, wall, or floor). DPS inspectors are trained to assess the dynamics of structural injury to determine whether or not engineering evaluation is needed.

Information about obtaining permits can be found at the DPS website:
www.montgomerycountymd.gov/permitting_services.

LAND DEVELOPMENT

WHEN YOUR SEPTIC SYSTEM FAILS, THINGS CAN GET PRETTY UGLY!

Proper design, installation, and maintenance of your septic system will maximize its life and prevent failures that can be unsightly, foul smelling, and threatening to your family's health and the environment.

The best way to maintain your septic system and thereby avoid problems is to have the tank pumped out every three to five years depending on use. This will prevent solids from building up in the tank. If solids are not removed on a regular basis, they will flush out of the septic tank, flow into the drainfields, clog the soil, and prevent it from absorbing liquid. Should this be allowed to happen, the septic system could fail prematurely.

Under normal use, a septic system will last 15 to 25 years. When, and if, your septic system fails, DPS can assist you with an analysis of the cause and, if necessary, design and permit a replacement system (known in the industry as a "repair"). To serve you better, we have streamlined our permit process and reduced the fees for a repair permit.

Your house is probably your biggest investment. Conscientiously maintaining your septic system will help you protect that investment. The Well and Septic Office of DPS has records showing the location of most septic tanks and systems in the county. Call 240-777-6320 if you need help locating your septic tank or if you have other questions about your septic system, or download a "Request for Septic System Location"

form from our web site, <http://permittingservices/montgomerycountymd.gov> and fax it us at 240-777-6262. Allow up to 30 days for us to research your request and get back to you.



DPS IS BUILDING A STORM-DRAIN DATABASE

In 1997, in consultation with DPS and the Department of Public Works and Transportation, the Department of Environmental Protection initiated a storm-drain-database project that inventoried existing emplacements. The database was incorporated into the County's Geographic Information System ("GIS") and made available to DPS. Over this past summer, DPS interns worked to update the GIS database for emplacements added since 1997.

The GIS information is readily available to engineers and landowners interested in determining the approximate location of storm-drain-system components. The information includes features such as inlets, outlets, headwalls, channels, pipes, culverts and manholes. Profile information is not available via the database and can only be researched via the permit file.

If you are interested in obtaining information about public or private storm-drain systems, please contact DPS at 240-777-6240, or visit our web site at <http://permittingservices/montgomerycountymd.gov> to download a "Request for Public Information" form that can be mailed or faxed to us. Please allow approximately 30 days for us to research your request.

CERTIFIED PROFESSIONALS IN STORM WATER QUALITY

After passing a qualifying examination and a peer review of their education and experience, DPS Senior Permitting Specialists Richard Gee and Mike Geier are now “Certified Professionals in Storm Water Quality.” The employees perform engineering reviews of stormwater-management /sediment-control plans under the supervision of Permitting Services Manager Rick Brush.

The certification process is administered by CPESC Incorporated, in cooperation with the International Erosion Control Association and the Soil and Water Conservation Society. Richard and Mike join co-workers Mark Etheridge, Dave Kuykendall, and Leo Galanko in having achieved this prestigious certification.

PIONTKA ACHIEVES LEED ACCREDITATION

DPS Permitting Services Specialist Nadine Piontko passed the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design



(“LEED”) Accreditation Examination as administered by the U.S. Green Building Council. She now joins a select group of individuals who are LEED Accredited Professionals.

LEED was created to promote the construction of buildings that are environmentally responsible, profitable, and healthful to live and work in. LEED standards include parameters for indoor air quality, water con-

servation, energy efficiency, the use of natural and recycled building materials, and environmentally friendly site design.

LEED accreditation signifies that the accredited person has demonstrated knowledge of these principals and standards.

Congratulations Nadine!

PROFICIENCY ADVANCEMENTS



Proficiency advancements are non-competitive promotions that recognize an employee’s readiness to assume the duties of the mid-level or highest classification at which his or her position has been budgeted. Most proficiency advancements in DPS require completion of occupationally-specific certification requirements for promotion to the highest classification level. We are pleased to announce that the following employees have been proficiency advanced within their respective positions:

Derek Isensee--Permitting Services Inspector III--Division of Land Development (Sediment Control/Stormwater Management) **Certified**

Heather Gottke-- Permit Technician II--Division of Casework Management (Building Construction)

Congratulations, Derek and Heather!

NEW DPS EMPLOYEES



Erik Flieger joined DPS on September 7, 2004, as an Administrative Aide in the Division of Casework Management, where he will augment support services in the division. Erik reports to Permitting Services Manager Gail Lucas.

Erik previously worked for the Department of Public Works and Transportation, and most recently, for the Department of Liquor Control as a Liquor Store Clerk.

On November 1, 2004, Jesse Miller will begin his DPS career as a Permitting Services Specialist II in the Division of Building Construction under the supervision of Permitting Services Manager Phil Wacławski. Jesse will review plans for fire-detection and suppression systems in commercial buildings.

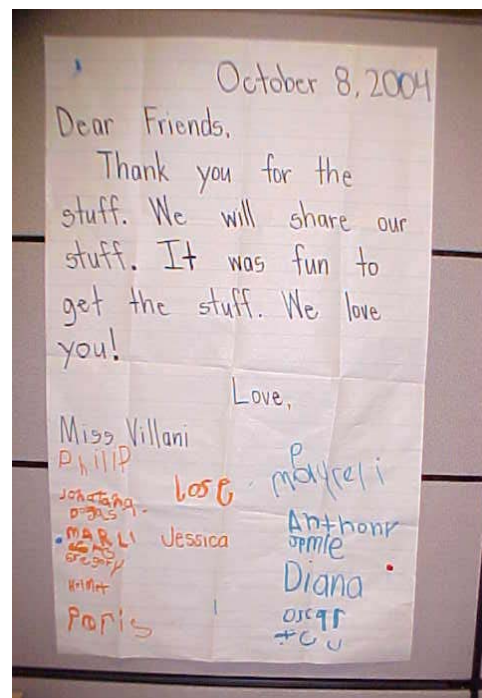
Jesse's most recent experience includes engineer positions with Prince George's and Fairfax Counties. He has a Bachelor's Degree in Industrial Technology (Architectural Engineering) from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.

Please join us in welcoming Erik and Jesse to their new positions in DPS.

DPS QUIK PICS



Several Permit Technicians, represented by Linda Brzoztowski shown in the back row middle, gathered supplies for a kindergarten class at Broad Acres Elementary School in Silver Spring. DPS EAA Nancy Villani's daughter Katie (back row left) teaches the class that received the supplies. The students sent the letter pictured below to thank the PT's.





Department of Permitting Services
255 Rockville Pike, Second Floor
Rockville, Maryland 20850-4166

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Rockville MD
Permit No. 138

DPS MAIN TELEPHONE NUMBER
(240) 777-6300

- | | |
|-----------------------|---|
| (240) 777-6210 | To: Schedule an Inspection Cancel an Inspection Find the status of a permit Receive documents via fax |
| (240) 777-6259 | Complaints |
| (240) 777-6370 | Questions related to residential building permits (new construction, additions, alterations, sheds, decks, fences, swimming pools), commercial building permits, demolition permits, fire-alarm permits, fire-sprinkler permits, Use-and-Occupancy Certificates, and Historic Area Work Permits |
| (240) 777-6320 | Questions related to subdivision development, permits to work in the right-of-way, stormwater-management concepts, sediment-control permits, and well-and-septic permits |
| (240) 777-6240 | Questions related to zoning, setbacks, information, building-height restrictions, special exceptions, electrical permits and licenses, mechanical permits, vendor licenses, sign permits, and Permitting Services records |
| (240) 777-6260 | Division of Casework Management |
| (240) 777-6350 | Division of Land Development |
| (240) 777-6200 | Division of Building Construction |
| (240) 777-6360 | Office of the Director |
| (240) 777-6256 | TTY |

For information or to be included
on the mailing list, call
240-777-6364

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